The
Progressive Review
Nbr 277 Washington's Voice of Progressive Politics March 1989

Post-Reconstruction Blues

Reflections on Marion Barry & the struggles of black power

A reporter called the other day, wanting to interview me about Marion Barry, the currently notorious mayor of Washington. I said fine, on one condition: you let me interview you about why every damn reporter in the country has decided to write about Marion Barry now. His current troubles, I pointed out, don't even amount to his most interesting scandal.

I was being flip, but the question kept coming back. I had known Marion since soon after he arrived in Washington in the mid-sixties. He once introduced me as "one of the first white people who'd have anything to do with me." I had worked with him, supported him in his early campaigns and convinced others to do the same. When Marion began to slip, some of the latter would suggest I shared the blame. "What do you think of *your* mayor now?" they would ask.

On the wall of my office is one of Marion's bumper stickers. It says, "Barry: The way things ought to be." I look at it sometimes and think of the way things should have been.

My own break with Marion came more than six years ago over issues unrelated to the current furor, real issues such as development and neighborhood rights and lying in the campaign about your position about such matters.

The other stuff, the stuff that eventually made Washington a joke across the nation, was just beginning to crop up. But that seemed less important. I believed Lincoln had the right attitude. When told Grant was drinking too much, he replied: find out what he's drinking and send a case to all my other generals. What Barry did after hours didn't really concern me; what he did on the job mattered a lot.

It eventually became clear that they were of a piece. It's hard to separate the two when a mayor spends one-third of his supposedly working days out of the city, largely, it appeared, for recreational purposes.

Among the mayor's first public troubles was his curious incuriosity about his first wife's spending habits (supported, it turned out in court, by government funds intended for other use) These troubles eventually escalated to include the conviction of his political alter ego, Ivanhoe Donaldson, and ten other city officials. These tales of conventional corruption, however, have been amply garnished by anecdotes that have led more than a few to the perception of the mayor as a insatiable Don Juan alternately (or simultaneously) high on drugs and alcohol.

To the extent that such perceptions were unfair, Marion Barry long did little to dissuade them. When it was alleged that he was visiting a woman who was dealing dope, the mayor responded that Karen Johnson was merely a social acquaintance, probably one of the few times apparent adultery has been used as exculpation for a drug charge. Karen Johnson went to jail rather than testify as to her relations with the mayor. Her boyfriend -- who first led investigators to the story, was squirreled away in the federal protective custody program, presumably because unnamed persons wanted to get him. And the mayor began a lengthy game of cat and mouse with the US Attorney, played out most prominently on the pages of the *Washington Post.*

That was long ago, although recently a local business magazine ran a lengthy retrospective on the Karen Johnson affair, complete with an alleged page from her diary in which she rated Barry as a "good lay" but later downgraded him to C+ or B-.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Less legally interesting, but every bit as good reading, was Barry's pursuit of an extraordinarily attractive woman. This pursuit, foiled several times, frustrated Barry to the point that he once arrived at the woman's rented home on Capitol Hill in blue velour running suit and baseball hat (emblazoned with the word *Mayor*) and talked his way in. Unfortunately for Barry, the pursued woman's landlady -- who happened to be prominent in local Democratic circles, was on the scene and vented her ire on Marion and the mayor's command center (which apparently is as close to a chaperone as Barry has). Her efforts resulted in getting the mayor out of the house and once again into the papers.

Barry has twice felt the need to call an ambulance while at a party and at least once met the ambulance on the sidewalk away from whatever was going on. In each case, conventional medical problems have been cited. (The first time I believed Barry's diagnosis and wrote him a note offering my mother's recipe for drinking with a hiatal hernia: consume only American brandy and French champagne and never reverse the nationality and the brew.)

On another occasion Barry "overslept" after a west coast Super Bowl and failed to show up for a scheduled appearance on the popular black talk show hosted by Cathy Hughes. Hughes, like most who know Barry, was not surprised by his tardiness (In the 60s, Marion used to say he ran on CPT, "colored people's time"), but as delay turned into absence, Hughes got on the phone live to the District Building only to find that no one there knew where he was either. Getting Cathy Hughes mad was one of Barry's worst political mistakes to date, but he quickly recovered with a rain date appearance in the rare persona of a humble man.

These are just some of the high points. A full discussion of the Barry administration scandals would necessarily bring up such topics as masturbation, kickbacks, threats, group sex, missing funds, and whether one normally goes to a strip joint in the early hours of the morning to obtain a campaign contribution.

All of this surfaced as news or gossip before anyone outside of Washington found Barry very interesting. But this time he became national and international news. Among rational explanations for the sudden extraterritorial fascination with our local issues is undoubtedly that the accumulated incidents, allegations and facts had reached a critical mass. I am currently struggling through Stephen Hawkins's *A Brief History of Time* and one of the few things I can easily understand is his metaphor for the forces around a black hole. He offers the example of an intrepid astronaut approaching such a hole with impunity but at a critical point being subjected to gravitational forces so disparate at his feet and his head that he would be literally torn apart. It could be that the Barry administration has landed on its black hole.

This city is also suffering from a record epidemic of murders, many of them drug-related. There is immense frustration, especially in the police department, whose leaders, atypically, have taken to publicly wringing their hands. In such a situation, to have the mayor even remotely connected with allegations of a drug deal throws the futility of their efforts straight in their face.

But there is something else as well. Something both more subtle and potentially more disturbing. The recent incidents (at apparent worse involving the use of drugs and the misuse of government funds amounting to less than a half million dollars) themselves do not deserve the coverage outside the city they have received. Nothing revealed to date establishes Washington as other than the Avis of urban corruption. But Barry is clearly in many minds a symbol and what he is a symbol of is, simply, black power.

The Progressive Review

Bucking the System Since 1966

The Progressive Review is published approximately 9 times a year. Formerly the DC Gazette. One year subscription: $10. Two year subscription: $18. Single issue $1. The Review uses the news services of College Press Service, Pacific News Service and Hersay News Service. Editor: Sam Smith. ISSN 0889- 2202.

1739 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington DC 20009
202--232-5544

Compuserve ID# 72057,1525
Peacenet Conference: pn.dc
Peacenet handle: ssmith

Just like we said

If black America continues to slip as it did during eight years of the most callous administration in half a century, it won't really be Marion Barry's fault. But he'll have played a part, because at a time when the black movement was suffering from a bad case of the post-reconstruction blues, he provided a precise and highly visible, if invalid, excuse for many whites to say, "We told you so."

The black movement, like the white radical movement of the sixties, was meant to change America forever. Neither white nor black activists heard clearly enough what may have been the most prescient advice of their shared moment. It came from Bobby Seale who said, "Seize the time."

It was quoted but not understood. The time was seized, but there was little sense of the immense impermanence of change or of the need to seize new times over and over again, in different ways, with different ideas and different people.

In some ways the black movement fared better than the white. With the ending of the draft, the white radicals lost their replacement troops; with age they lost enthusiasm; and with loss of enthusiasm they lost the media. Not being identifiable by color and choosing no longer to identify themselves by dress, they faded into the great mush of acceptable American diversity.

Blacks, always identifiable and buoyed by a steady of string of small successes, kept both enthusiasm and attention. But increasingly, the rhetoric and the achievements seemed to lack the feel of reality. And in the 80s, the first clear signs of reversal became apparent. America's second reconstruction period was nearing the end.

It was sometimes difficult to see this because of the spread of the photo opportunity and the sound bite as a substitute for real life. If Jesse Jackson was on television running for president, blacks must be doing all right, right? But like Barbara Bush going to a shelter to be filmed reading to the homeless refugee young, there was nothing beyond the instant other than a vague hope that somehow vision and reality would some day blend. In fact, black progress was thriving as a symbol even as it was crumbling in truth. Symbol and reality not only were out of sync, they were in contrary motion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As Jackson's remarkable campaign was underway, the number of black men admitted to colleges was dropping, the Supreme Court was preparing to gut affirmative action, Miami was on the cusp of a riot and blacks in Washington were killing each other at a record rate. Drug addiction, infant mortality, homelessness, crime, the failure of public education, and joblessness rates stripped American urban ghettos of most reminders that there once had been a "war on poverty."

A few years ago I read a detailed account of life in the H Street NE corridor of Washington. It was a neighborhood I knew well from two decades earlier when that war was underway and I was editing a community newspaper. It was the toughest part of my community, and --when the '68 riots came, one of the most heavily hit parts of town. The morning after the burning, national guard troops patrolled H Street in formation, passing beside the still smoking rubble and the remnants of walls of what was once the city's second busiest shopping strip.

Yet bad as it was, it had one of the city's most successful community credit unions, numerous civic organizations dedicated to improving things. people to attend their meetings and do something, block clubs, community organizers, attorneys practicing poor law, and even some white businessmen who had come together belatedly to help.

Bad as it was, I found it hard to believe, in reading that article nearly two decades later, that so much of that which had been good or had offered hope of the good, had disappeared without a trace. H Street in the 60s had been a sick place slowly getting better -- a poor, failing community but a community. H Street in the 80s seemed dead, a science fictional vision of urban disintegration.

It was a shock. For if the writer had described the situation fairly it was not, as I had presumed, merely that the cyclical waves of history had rolled over H Street, moving backwards halfway in order to soon move forward again. Rather H Street had retreated well behind its minimal survival level of the sixties to a brutish anarchy, inescapable, immutable, and invisible.

It is the H Streets of America that offer the most damning indictment of the Reagan administration, an administration that drove past the social problems of the country in its stretch limousines along streets lined with those stretched to the limit or strung out beyond limit, with no one to do their caring for them.

Prelude

But it wasn't only Reagan who had gained power in Washington during this period. Marion Barry had entered office as mayor two year earlier.

Barry arrived from the south to head up the city's SNCC office. He quickly made an impression. He organized a massive one day bus boycott to protest a rise in fares during which over 100,000 people didn't ride a bus. I was one of the volunteer drivers providing free jitney service that day and had written about it. I had covered sit-ins, demonstrations, and the depressing US Civil Rights Commission hearings in Mississippi, but this was the first time I had done anything about it. Barry read the piece, called me up and asked for my help in public relations. My background in radio news and public relations was useful, as was my color, especially with a media that was, in those days, almost entirely white.

My first impressions of Barry stayed for many years. I found him likable, extremely hard-working, imaginative, intelligent, and creative and motivated by moral concerns. Although I was to learn that he was something of a womanizer, I never recall seeing him high. Our different ethnicities were never a point of conflict, and I early saw him as not only someone who could lead the city towards the self-government we hadn't had in nearly a century, but who could run the place when we reached that goal.

The first goal of SNCC's Washington project, the Free DC Movement, was home rule for the city. But as the movement grew, it expanded its scope quickly -- at one point including a massive attempt to identify the true holdings of every slumlord in the city, in order that effective action could be taken against them. In pre-computer days, it was a project doomed to failure but it suggests both the energy and the diligence of the times.

It was a time when blacks and whites could work together and, under Barry's leadership, they did. It was not extraordinary; it was one of the givens of the civil rights movement. Even SNCC had a button showing a black and white hand clasped over a Confederate flag.

And although Barry was an anathema to the white business leaders and considered a rogue by the local civil rights establishment, as early as 1966 a poll found him ranked fifth by black residents as the person who had done the most for blacks in DC. They probably underrated him.

Meanwhile, in SNCC and elsewhere, the spirit of black nationalism was awakening. I would soon attend a meeting at the DC SNCC office at which Stokley Carmichael gave a brief talk. And from that talk, although there was nothing personal in his remarks, I was to learn that whites were no longer part of the movement.

I was sorry, because I found my brief involvement exhilarating and, I hoped, useful. But I wasn't angry. In fact, as I learned more about black nationalism, I came to accept its logic and to recognize its necessity. Blacks had made tremendous progress in the past decade but had done so without culturally defining themselves much beyond their rights. Without a strong concept of self-knowledge and self-pride, the movement would ultimately become a vehicle without a destination.

White like me

Besides, black nationalism raised new questions about whites, even white civil rights activists, and they needed to be answered, too.

The feelings of exclusion, alienation and the put-downs would come later when, after the '68 riots, the spirit of nationalism moved rapidly from theory to cultural norm and whites like me found they no longer had the black friends they thought they did. A wall had silently fallen between us, a wall that, to this day, divides blacks and whites in Washington more frequently than its hard-won openings allow unselfconscious mutual warmth and respect. Disappointing as this was, it seemed at the time a small price to pay for not just the legal, but also the psychological, empowerment of a people. From antithesis will come synthesis, I said to myself.

In fact, it was much harder than that. For a white activist, black nationalism demanded considerable introspection and self-criticism, and the bid was soon raised for white male activists by the explosion of the feminist

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

movement. To move from presumed purity to purported villainy in a matter of a few years took some getting used to.

I was too independent and unrepentant to accept the mantle of guilt that black nationalists prescribed for white liberals and white liberals accepted for themselves. Besides, I thought there was something fundamentally wrong with the dynamic. Mau-mauing, as black psychological warfare was then dubbed, was a service to neither race.

Enthusiastic as I was about black power and self-discovery I could see no advantage to whites pretending they didn't or shouldn't matter. After all, we comprised nearly a third of the city and the goal remained -- although clearly on hold, that blacks and whites would some day see their cultural differences as a source of common pride.

Long before the black power movement I had written an article that noted the difference between integration and desegregation and suggesting the hazards of the former as then defined: the total absorption of blacks into white culture. The problem was, and remains: how to develop an equality among the different rather than one based on an artificial monolith of culture and values; how to create a society that respects, even celebrates, its unlikenesses.

The position towards which I found myself moving was extremely conventional in theory but decidedly offbeat in practice. I simply viewed myself as being part of a minority. In this role, those of us who were white should not try to dominate or even, often, hope to prevail, but we should be heard, we should be treated fairly and we should be allowed no lesser dreams for ourselves than if we were blacks in Washington or majority whites in another city.

This paradigm would be tested many times in the years that followed, and while I held to it, in practice I often pulled my punches. I was more willing than many whites to be called a racist (Told by a black friend that one politician had described me thus, I replied, "That explains me, but how do you explain her?") Yet I was not willing to seek it or enjoy it.

Still, I became convinced that the growing white passivity and non-participation in city affairs would do neither whites nor blacks any good. In retrospect, the unwillingness of whites to stand up to Marion Barry may have helped to kill him with kindness. To this day, no matter how hazy his vision on other matters, he can still count pretty well. (In fact, one of Barry's initial reactions to his current trouble was a serious attempt to rebuild white support.) Yet too often the white precincts weren't heard from. The tragedy of Marion Barry is not just a black problem; it is at least partially the result of a white minority that was afraid to be a full member of the city community. The irony is that not only was there no empirical basis for this fear -- involved whites bore relatively few scars, but the attitude was unconsciously demeaning. Being willing to argue with someone is a symbol of respect and many whites sent a silent signal that they didn't think enough of the black leadership to fight with it.

The good years

It is hard in these times when racial conflict has been sublimated into turgid legal arguments to appreciate the power of the simple concept of black pride. Yet it changed America not only for blacks, and not only for women and for other minorities who borrowed the principle, but for whites as well. It introduced cultural relativism to our education, our literature, our history, even, if still poorly, to our media. Race aside, it made America both wiser and, in the best sense of the word, more sophisticated.

In politics, however, it presented both opportunity and temptation. As black nationalism became more popular, it was easy to find politicians who approached the concept much as the New Right approaches the pledge of allegiance and the Pentagon. Ethnicity in the political arena became both a new horizon and, too often, the last refuge of the scoundrel.

To his credit, Marion Barry long understood the difference. As his interests moved from protest to politics, and as the city gained a measure of self-government, Barry maintained his stature as an ethnic leader while at the same time reaching out to a white constituency. That constituency had a strong traditional progressive impulse; it expected both concern and efficiency or, as Barry was to dub it later, "competence and compassion."

Barry's entered politics through the school board. Children were still important to Washington then (one of the least noted demographic changes in the city over the past two decades has been its massive loss of children) and many whites still sent their children to public schools, if only for the elementary years.

Barry did well enough on the school board to hold his bi-racial coalition together and win a seat on the city council. In fact, that coalition survived his first race for mayor, which he won by a nose in a three-way contest.

One of the more amazing ironies of the current furor is the revival of talk of "the plan," according to which, it is alleged, the white minority plots to take over the city. Attacks on the mayor are, it is said, part of "the plan."

Yet the "plan" was actually the creation of Lillian Wiggins, columnist of the *Afro-American*. In 1978, she wrote "This town must never become another Rhodesia ruled by a white minority. We say to the faceless and nameless people trying to lull us to sleep that race will always be a factor with us as long as Ward Three votes the way it does."

And what sin, precisely, had nearly all-white Ward Three committed? It had thrown its support to the election of Marion Barry as mayor.

On the whole, fundamentalist black power advocates made waves but did not do as well politically. Even in the black community, there was less support for the advocate than for the idea. Washington, Leadbelly had noted, was a bourgeois town. It was also a bureaucratic town that liked civic order and in which blacks had survived years of segregation by building their own community of dignity, style and civility. This was challenged by the young angries of the sixties. Besides, many of them had come from somewhere else and were considered interlopers.

Become a supporting subscriber

Many small circulation alternative publications keep going with the help of supporting subscribers who contribute a sum in addition to their regular subscription to aid the publication in its work. You will note on your renewal form that there is such a category. We will be grateful if you will indicate your support of our efforts by subscribing with a contribution above the normal fee. Or you can renew right now by sending us your mailing label and a contribution. Mail to the Progressive Review, 1739 Connecticut Ave NW, DC 20009.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A few black militants made it, if briefly. One was Rev. Doug Moore, a bright eccentric politician who once shattered the stereotypes of an all-white audience in Spring Valley by beginning the first two minutes of his campaign speech in perfect French.

Mostly though, Washington became a study in the difference between talking about black power and gaining it. It largely chose the latter and in the process quickly, peacefully, and with a minimum of angst, changed from a white-run to a black-run city. Barry, notwithstanding anything he's done lately, played an important part in this change.

It's mine now

Barry, as mayor, initially offered considerable hope. He introduced new trashcans on wheels that greatly improved the efficiency of the sanitation department. He put the government's financial house in order. He improved relations with Congress, reduced the size of the bureaucracy, and appointed more women and minorities to important positions.

But Barry also moved sharply towards the white big business community and away from his white liberal supporters. His stand on development issues, in particular, alienated white support. Barry, in effect, was driving a wedge between whites while solidifying his black support. Development, he promised blacks, was going to bring jobs. Since most of the development would be in white neighborhoods, the question of density, traffic and destruction of community would not be a black political issue.

Thus black power cut a deal with white power. The middle class and poor of either race weren't part of the deal although they were mightily affected by it.

In fact, the deal didn't bring jobs to blacks. By 1986 there were some 40,000 more private jobs in DC than in 1980, but a thousand fewer DC residents were employed. All the new jobs in that period went to mostly white suburban commuters. There is some evidence that DC's share of the new jobs has increased since then, but not enough to justify the mayor's claims.

Barry's new political approach inevitably changed his rhetoric. He at times seemed more of a black nationalist than he had been when wearing a dashiki in the 60s. And as he proved in his second run for election, he didn't need white votes any more. He had simply co-opted ethnicity for his own political purposes much as Reagan had co-opted patriotism.

Those who accepted Barry as the most powerful of blacks had black power. Black lawyers found themselves involved in multi-million dollar bond deals, black developers got a nice piece of the action, major black businesses got city contracts.

But it didn't get down to the streets. One study, for example, showed that Barry's vaunted minority business program actually only benefited a relative handful of politically well-connected firms. Being black was not enough to get the city's blessings. This was dismally demonstrated when a small developer, a black woman, attempted to get city approval for a minor project that would have well served an inner city community. She was not, however, part of the new good old boy network. Not only did the city not help, it repeatedly dragged its feet. The woman became so frustrated and financially strapped by the obstacles and delays of the DC government that, in desperation, she forged a name on a needed document. She was caught and went to jail. But Marion Barry never missed a beat in his bragging about what he had done for black business.

Meanwhile, other blacks were coming into power in American cities, many of them cutting similar deals with white corporate leaders.

Black power no longer meant mainly culture, values and ideas. It meant urban politics with the black mayor as king and white business as parliament.

In the process, the other voices of blackness -- writers, preachers, educators, the voices that had guided black culture through lonely years of struggle, became relatively less important. The leaders of the black community became its politicians, with all the dangers and pitfalls that particular type of leadership entails.

Much as Ronald Reagan's cynical manipulation of American values tended to silence vibrant discourse and debate, so Marion Barry's manipulation of black symbols turned Washington from into a one-question town: are you for him or against him?

There was no one around like the late local civil rights leader Julius Hobson who had little use for black preachers or politicians who preyed on their own people. Hobson used to accuse congressional delegate Walter Fauntroy, who talked incessantly of his close relationship with Martin Luther King, of "running in the shadow of a dead man."

Hobson once told of being asked to speak at a black church:

"When I went there I looked over the congregation. I would say the average person in there had on a pair of Thom McAn shoes, the suits cost an average of $35 apiece, their shirts were from Hecht's basements, and they were very poor and very illiterate -- almost illiterate -- people who were emotionally shocked, just came to the church to let out this scream. [The minister] took up a love offering, he took up a minister's travel offering and then he took up a regular -- he took up five or six offerings. So when he got to me to speak, I got up and said, "God damnit, if this is Christianity, I want no part of it. . .This son of a bitch is stealing from you, and the thing is, he's not just stealing your money, he's stealing your minds. And I refuse to be part of this.' And I walked off."

In the 80s there was no one to talk like that to Marion Barry, though he too was stealing people's minds. Like a cable televangelist he was conning people out of their dreams and hopes and placing them in his personal storeroom of power.

Barry would later use as part of his defense the argument that he had done nothing that white urban bosses hadn't done before him. It was partially true, but he left out a couple of things. One was that many of these bosses were caught. Even the king of them all, Boss Tweed, spent his last five years in jail.

Besides, the urban corruption of a half century and more ago was substantively different from that of today. The old bosses were servants as well as masters. The deal they cut with their constituency included a level of access to city hall that has not been seen in urban America in many years. Barry doesn't even tithe to the people, let alone see himself under obligation to them in the manner of a Curley or a Daley.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Did it have to happen?

It might have worked out differently. If, for example, the manifestations of black power had included stronger non-political leadership it would have helped. If blacks had a stronger ethnic media in which internal criticism and debate could have flowed with the freedom one finds, for example, in Jewish publications, it would have helped. If more emphasis had been placed on economic power instead of political power it would have helped. And it would have helped if blacks hadn't tried to do it so much on their own.

The dominance of black political leadership is not entirely of black choosing. It is a source of continuing aggravation to blacks that a white media is still able to exert so much power in determining black "leadership." Still, the willingness of the white media to determine and the black community to accept formed a symbiotic relationship of considerable force.

The black media remains pitifully weak, with the sole exception of black radio. In terms of print media, pre-civil rights giants like Ebony and Jet have yet to be successfully challenged. And because black dissent has often been regarded more as treachery than as a service, discussions of black issues tend towards the evangelical rather than the probing.

The lack of progress in economic power may largely be a quirk of history. The civil rights movement occurred as America was becoming increasingly service and government oriented. That's where the jobs were. As the prize for their political freedom, blacks were brought into white America's most rigid bureaucracies: big government and big corporations. It is perhaps significant, for example, that for awhile it looked as though among next year's black candidates for DC mayor would be two utility company executives. And they were exceptions in their willingness to think about it. For many successful blacks in town, being mayor could be considered a step backwards.

In Washington the black entrepreneurship which does exist is closely tied to business from the government. Besides, blacks had always been denied entrepreneurial opportunity outside of agriculture and the frequent role model for such opportunity in the city was the disdained mom & pop store or the gouging retail outlet. Thus it is not surprising that blacks paid relatively little attention to the matter.

As just one example of the lost potential, though, it was periodically argued that black churches should pool their resources to make the type of impact on business that blacks have made on politics. It seldom happened.

Finally, the projection of black separatism onto politics was threatened from the start. The success of minorities in American politics depends upon an ethnic group being a base from which to extend power far beyond its boundaries. A black politics that didn't presume eventual leadership of a white constituency was mathematically doomed in all but a few places. By deliberately placing their politics in a ghetto, politicians like Barry set both low expectations and low real limits.

The Catch-22 of this situation was that to be a black leader you had to stick to a black constituency; if you went beyond that constituency --as Tom Bradley did in California and Doug Wilder is doing now in Virginia, you gained power but you were less of a black leader. Thus winning, in a classic political sense, was considered suspect.

Even as shrewd a black politician as Jesse Jackson had trouble with this. In 1984 he spoke of a Rainbow Coalition but it was little more than words. In 1988 he actually set off to find the rainbow. The results startled not only the media and white America, but probably even Jackson as well.

It shouldn't have. Out of an experience as painful as that of American black culture, out of values as strong and transferrable of that of the black community, and out of a training in human dignity as intense as that of the civil rights movement, comes a wisdom and sensitivity that could benefit all people. They first, however, had to discover it.

Picking up the pieces

At the moment, Washington is in a fragile state. We are all -- black and white, hostages of one man's acts, his will and his conscience. The results have not been pleasant for a city that has usually handled its racial tensions and differences better than most.

Those differences are clearly there. On inauguration eve I started towards a counter-inaugural party down one of the main avenues of white Washington. Just above the Sheraton-Park I ran into a huge traffic jam. It occurred to me as I sat there that traffic --like everything else in town, operates on an ethnic basis. I made a U-turn and headed north a few blocks to drive around the perimeter of downtown through black Washington. There was little traffic and no sign that anyone along the way had anything to celebrate about a new president. It was a metaphor for the city.

Thus the reactions to Barry's troubles vary. If there is one thing people have in common it is that everyone seems to feel a little boxed in. You sense a tendency for people to say less than is on their minds. The rules are no longer clear. Barry is no longer the unchallenged boss but what does that mean?

There are signs. White businessmen, in their ever so cautious manner, are expressing off-the-record concern not for acts committed but for their effect on "the business climate."

A group of black councilmembers visited Barry and reportedly urged him not to run again.

And, perhaps most significantly, a leading black columnist cut through the waffling and the ethnic shield in a column headed "Shame on the Mayor."

Courtland Milloy wrote:

"As far as I'm concern, Mayor Marion Barry has lost his credibility, creativity and ability to deal with the deficits, prisons, murders and potholes -- to say nothing of public perceptions of himself."

He called Barry's administration "brain-dead in the water [with] our children falling dead in the streets."

The emperor has no clothes. Washington was on its way to recovery.

The departure of Barry could be one of the best things that ever happened to black Washington. Barry himself, in the seventies, said, "One of our problems is that we're not developing any local leadership. I came to Washington in 1965 and I see basically the same leadership that was here when I came. Same faces. I'd like to contribute to changing that in some way." He could. By leaving.

Freed of its psychological dependence on the fate of one flawed man, black Washington's ideas, energy and talent could flower again. It could come out from the shadows of enforced, ethnic unity into the shared pride in its own diversity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I am less worried about what will happen in DC than I am about the conclusions those outside will draw from what has happened here. A staggering struggle for black progress didn't deserve Barry's antics. It didn't deserve the laughter and the smug conclusions. I only hope -- no I really expect, in a year or so, this town will at least be able to say to those so sadly or gleefully looking at our troubles, "Yes, we had a problem, but we took care of it."

* * *

A few years ago, a black student at Howard told me, "Nationalism is just a stage you go through." I was startled by the casualness of his comment, but it occurred to me that I might be looking into the face of the new black America. A black America that considered many of the assumptions of its elders to be only history, a black America ready to make its own rules for dealing with both the cruelty and opportunity of the larger country, a black America that might yet remold black power so it had both strength and permanence. -- *Sam Smith*

Weather Report

The 1988 ADA voting record finds a drop in the liberal quotient of the Senate (from 53% to 48%), but the House results hit a new high of 52%. In three previous election years, the House average had always taken a dip. (See next page for charts). Democrats in the Senate running for reelection were more liberal than the Senate as a whole (84% vs. 72%). Only two senators scored 100% this year (Leahy and Pell), along with 24 members of the House (Atkins, Dullums, Downey, Edwards, Evans, Frank, Gonzalez, Kastenmeir, Lehman, Leland, Levin, Lewis, Lwory, Morrison, Pelosi, Sabo, Savage, Schumer, Studds, Synar, Visclosky, Wheat, and Wolpe.

Among Congressmembers who figured in presidential politics this year or are mentioned for 1992, here are some scores:

Bentsen	40%
Bumpers	80%
Bradley	75%
Dole	15%
Gephardt	75%
Gore	60%
Mitchell	95%
Nunn	40%
Quayle	5%
Simon	85%
Wirth	95%

Meanwhile, the *National Journal,* names as most liberal senators Harkin, Kennedy, Kerry, Leahy, Mikulski, and Simon.

Bush's election wasn't the only bad poltical news last fall. Voter turnout hit its lowest level since 1924 and, according to a study in *Public Opinion,* incumbents did better than ever. In fact, incumbent House members won by over 60% of the vote in nearly 88% of their races. This is up from 78% ten years ago, 72% twenty years ago, and 63% thirty years ago. At this rate, we can give up having House elections by the year 2000. The incumbentocracy can just declare itself the winner.

A 1986 survey by Columbia University researchers found that 56% of physicians favor some form of national health program, yet 76% believe the majority of doctors don't.

A Northwestern University study by Victor Lindquist reports that 47% of the companies hiring on the nation's campuses this year test job applicants for drug use. Another seven percent said they expect to start drug testing in 1989. Another survey, this one by Michigan State, produced somewhat lower results: 32% of the respondents said they tested for drugs.

In the midst of the media noise over Libya's purported chemical warfare plant, few journalists bothered to note that American spent $348 million in chemical and biological warfare research in 1986, up from $64 million in 1980.

Notice

Classified ads are ten cents a word. Count your own words and send check or money order to the Progressive Review, 1739 Conn. Ave NW, DC 20009

PROGRESSIVE PERIODICALS DIRECTORY just published! Reviews/details on 600 periodicals -- peace, environment, labor, culture, international, organizing, etc. Networking, publicity, subscription information. $8. Box 120574, Nashville TN 37212

Washington Books

Captive Capital: Review editor Sam Smith's classic book that tells the story of Washington during the turbulent sixties, up to the granting of home rule. $5

Secret City: Constance McLaughlin Green's history of black Washington, from the beginnings to the 1960s. $8.

Postcards of Old Washington: 32 postcards of historic Washington. $2.75

Washington: A History of the Capital from 1800 to 1950. Constance McLaughlin Green's Pulitzer Prize-winning book that remains the standard history of the city. $12.

Foggy Bottom: A study in the uses of an urban neighborhood. $4

A Selected Bibliography for Washington Studies: $6

Public Street Illumination in Washington DC: An illustrated history. $3.50

Alexander 'Boss' Shepherd the the Board of Public Works. $3

Law & Order in the Capital City: A history of the Washington Police 1800-1886. $3

Send check or money order to the Progressive Review, 1739 Connecticut Ave NW, DC 20009. Add $1.50 for postage & handling. DC residents add 6% sales tax

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED